



Maricopa County

News Release

Department of
Public Health
1825/45 E. Roosevelt St.
Phoenix, AZ 85006
Phone: 602-506-6900
Fax: 602-506-6885
publichealth.maricopa.gov

For additional information: Doug Hauth, Public Information Officer
(602) 506-4926, Pager (602) 205-3002

September 17, 2003

Bird in Maricopa County Positive for West Nile Virus

PHOENIX - The first positive sign that West Nile Virus has hit Maricopa County was confirmed today by Maricopa County Environmental Services Department's Vector Control. A sparrow was dropped off at the County's eastern regional office by a Chandler resident on September 11 and was sent to Tucson for testing. Today, the bird was confirmed to have West Nile Virus.

"West Nile Virus has shown up in 10 of Arizona's 15 counties," said John Townsend, Maricopa County Vector Control Manager. "It was just a matter of time before it reached Maricopa County."

There has been one reported human case in Arizona; none in Maricopa County. The adult male, a resident of Graham County, likely contracted the disease while visiting Colorado or Wyoming, states with considerable West Nile activity. He does not pose a health threat to other residents. West Nile Virus is not spread from one person to another.

The dead bird finding is part of Maricopa County's overall surveillance program. This program includes the routine testing of sentinel chickens, mosquitoes, and dead birds for Western Equine Encephalitis, West Nile Virus, and St. Louis Encephalitis.

If a dead bird is found in Maricopa County, place the carcass in a zip plastic bag, using gloves, and report it to the MEDS Complaint Line at 602-506-6616. If MCESD determines by phone that it wishes to examine the bird, the caller will be instructed how and where to deliver the bird. Acceptable specimens for analysis must meet the following criteria:

1. The bird must be freshly dead (less than 24 hours)
2. Body must NOT be soft, mushy or decomposed
3. Must NOT be a baby bird
4. Must NOT be a pigeon

In addition, birds must be kept chilled, but not frozen.

Officials recommend storage of the dead bird in a cooler with blue ice packs.

Freezing will kill the West Nile virus if the virus is present.

When handling the bird, be sure to use gloves or a plastic bag, then wash your hands immediately after packaging it.

more

Maricopa County residents are also urged not only to watch for dead birds, but to eliminate areas of standing water where mosquitoes breed. Buckets, dog bowls, ponds, decorative fountains and even old toys can collect water and become a perfect place for mosquitoes to lay eggs.

Residents are also encouraged to call the Environmental Citizens Complaint Line at 602-505-6616 or log on to maricopa.gov/envsvc to report a dead bird or register a mosquito complaint. In addition, for general health questions about West Nile Virus please call 602-506-6767.

When outside at night, residents can reduce getting bit by mosquitoes by using insect repellent with DEET and by wearing lightweight clothing that covers arms and legs.

Townsend added that normally mosquitoes won't travel far from their breeding site, therefore it is important that residents not only eliminate breeding sites in their own yards, but work with neighbors to make sure everyone is doing their part.

The best way to protect yourself from mosquito-borne illness is to reduce the number of mosquitoes around your home and neighborhood and to take personal precautions to avoid mosquito bites, such as:

- Eliminate standing water where mosquitoes can breed.
- Check for items outside the home that collect water, such as cans, bottles, jars, buckets, old tires, drums and other containers.
- Change water in flower vases, birdbaths, planters, and animal watering pans at least twice a week.
- Repair leaky pipes and outside faucets, and move air conditioner drain hoses frequently.
- Avoid being bitten by mosquitoes when going outside at night by using insect repellent. Wear lightweight clothing that covers the arms and legs.

For more information on the West Nile Virus, visit Maricopa County's Environmental Services website at www.maricopa.gov/envsvc or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention West Nile page: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/> or call CDC at: for English 888-246-2675, Spanish 888-246-2857, and TTY at 866-874-2646. These numbers are available from 5am to 8pm Arizona time Monday through Friday and 7am to 5pm Saturday and Sunday.